



## Operation Pope Francis

FALL 2015/WINTER 2016



### NJDOC Played Major Role in Papal Visit Security

When the Super Bowl was held at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford in 2014, the New Jersey Department of Corrections and other law enforcement agencies had about a year to plan ahead.

But when Pope Francis made his recent historic visit to the Northeast, planning had begun just two months earlier. And there were hundreds of thousands more people expected.

During the course of the planning, changes were frequent, some at the last minute. As Lt. Clay McClain of the department's Special Operations Group (SOG) described it, it was among the most challenging experiences, forming a plan within a tight window and then executing it.

"We had one-and-a-half weeks to put together the majority of the plan," said McClain, who served as the operations officer for "Operation Pope Francis." "Because it was the Pope, there were a lot of national security implications. It was challenging. There were multiple changes. A lot of long hours and preparation."

His assessment of the time crunch - and the fluidity of the assignment - was a familiar one among correction officers.



*The New Jersey Department of Corrections assisted in security operations and passenger screenings at Pennsauken Transit Center. Pictured are (from left) Senior Correction Officers Kevin Bray, Sean Sanders, Joe Heaton, Thananya Wooden, Alexis Matthews, Michael Tirado and Ruben Baca.*

"You've got to adapt and overcome," he said.

Undoubtedly, it was a hectic experience to provide security for, and welcome, the leader of the worldwide Catholic Church. But ultimately, NJDOC officials said it was very rewarding, and all went smoothly.

The NJDOC played an instrumental role during the Popes visit to Philadelphia and New York City between Friday, September 25, and Sunday, September 27. Among other things, the NJDOC assisted other law enforcement and transportation agencies, such as the New Jersey State Police, the Delaware River Port Authority and NJ Transit, in screening thousands of passengers at various stops along rail lines, spanning from North Jersey to Atlantic City. People who crossed the Ben Franklin Bridge were also searched.



*Members of the New Jersey Department of Corrections Special Operations Group take part in a discussion of security operations with New Jersey State Police at a command post.*

Several NJDOC employees worked the routes during that weekend. Besides the Special Operations Group, which includes the Canine Unit and the Chemical Ordnance Biological Radiological Aid Unit, other NJDOC units from which personnel came from included the Corrections Staff Training Academy, Central Transportation and the Special Investigations Division.

Some of the screenings were of a sophisticated nature that went far beyond the typical pat-downs. For example, at the Lindenwold rail station, NJDOC personnel worked with Camden County's hazardous materials team to screen passengers/visitors for radiation. They used a device called a Pack Eye, a radiation detection backpack.

Another procedure, known as "Step On, Step Off," was used for trains headed to New York City, where the Pope was on September 25. In this, NJDOC checked all trains before passengers boarded for any suspicious materials. Other duties included train platform security and looking for unattended bags, as well as information gathering, relaying information to a central command post, and explosives detection by the canines.

Assistant Commissioner Stephen D'Ilio was pleased with the department's performance.

"It was excellent," he said. "There were absolutely no issues. Employees represented the department extremely professionally."

The one incident that was potentially dangerous, according to Major James Keil of SOG, was a man who "verbalized thoughts of hurting himself" at the Millburn-Short Hills train station in Essex County. Fortunately, NJDOC personnel were able to talk him out of causing harm to himself, and he was later turned over to local authorities, Keil said.

Overall, the mood at the train stations was exhilarating.

"Having toured the different rail stations, the energy was electric," McClain said. "You could tell the emotions were very positive."

"Everyone was saying hello and how are you doing," Keil recalled. "There were so many positive reactions, and you start to exude that energy."

Along with the New Jersey State Police, the NJDOC provided a 25-member quick-reaction force that would intervene in the event of a large-scale disturbance. Fortunately, the unit didn't have to be deployed. A law enforcement operations post had been set up at Campbell's Soup World Headquarters in Camden.

While the papal visit will probably be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for many, it was actually McClain's second time. He also was involved in the security preparations for Pope John Paul II's historic visit to the United States in 1995. "It's not often that lightning strikes twice," he said.

McClain was pleased to see the Department of Corrections have this opportunity.

"For our department to play a significant role in this," he said, "it speaks volumes about the quality of staff we have working."





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## **Making a Difference**

# **'Volunteers of the Year' recognized at annual gathering**

It was an evening where acts of kindness and commitment to the New Jersey Department of Corrections inmate population were recognized publicly.

The NJDOC Volunteer Appreciation Day took place at the War Memorial in Trenton on the evening of October 6. The gathering provides an opportunity for volunteers from state correctional facilities throughout the state to meet under one roof.

Thirteen "Volunteers of the Year" were recognized. This year's Volunteers of the Year were: Imam Mubin Kathrada (Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility), Bishop Neville Copeland (Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center), the Rev. Thomas Williams (Bayside State Prison); the Rev. Owen Williams (Central Reception and Assignment Facility), Richard Griggs (East Jersey State Prison), Elder Arthur and Sister Carolyn Johnson (Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women), Elder Joseph McGettigan (Garden State Correctional Facility), Anthony Woods (Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility), George Phillip (New Jersey State Prison), Deacon David Loman (Northern State Prison), Robert Padilla Jr. (Southern State Correctional Facility), Henry Miller (South Woods State Prison), and Eleanor Novek (Literacy Volunteer of the Year).

Assistant Commissioner Darcella Sessomes, who coordinated the event, said the 13 volunteers have collectively provided 251 years of public service.

"They do it with love and commitment," she said.



Melinda Myricks, the coordinator for NJDOC's Volunteer Services, added, "Our volunteers are dedicated to our inmate population, and every year, I am always happy to show them gratitude for their tireless service with this event."

NJDOC Commissioner Gary M. Lanigan said the evening served as a way to recognize and thank the volunteers who devote much of their personal time to providing services "that are integral for the successful reentry" of inmates into society.

"Many of our mandates would be impossible to implement without the aid of volunteers," he said. He noted that the volunteers perform important tasks by helping inmates cope with addiction issues, improve their reading skills, and find salvation through religion.



*The Rev. Thomas Williams, (left), a volunteer at Bayside State Prison, was among those recognized at New Jersey Department of Corrections' 2015 Volunteer Appreciation Day. Also pictured are Bayside Associate Administrator James Stigliano (center) and Commissioner Gary M. Lanigan.*

*Photo by Al Trach*

"It was very, very nice, especially getting to meet other people," said the Rev. Thomas Williams, a "Volunteer of the Year" from Bayside State Prison.

A Vietnam War veteran, Williams had been exposed to Agent Orange. But he didn't let that stop him from having a positive outlook on life. He has been sharing his optimism with inmates at Bayside for the past six years, holding three weekly chapel services. He is a pastor at New Covenant Ministries, which regularly provides food and clothing for people in need and also gives bicycles to children during the holiday season. One time, Williams donated a brand new drum set to the prison, after noticing how run down the other one had been.

In his sermons, Williams tries to keep inmates' hopes up, stressing that it's never too late to turn one's life around.

Imam Mubin Kathrada tries to get inmates to believe in the idea of accepting change, because "change is the only thing that is guaranteed in life." A volunteer with the NJDOC since 1997, he said getting inmates to make major positive changes is immensely rewarding.

"The time is worthwhile," he said. "I feel like I'm making a difference."

Sister Carolyn Johnson and Elder Arthur Johnson have been longtime volunteers at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. They have been there every other Sunday for the last 30 years. At the dinner, it was announced they were retiring. Friends said Elder Arthur's baritone was among the most distinctive and will be missed.

Elder Johnson said many inmates never returned to prison, which he considers a sign of success. "They were very sincere," he said about the inmates' interest in his sermons.

Elder Joseph McGettigan, a volunteer at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility for the last 15 years, knows first-hand about finding redemption. Many years ago, he suffered from an addiction, mostly in the form of prescription drugs and marijuana.

"There was a lot of despondency, even suicidal tendencies," McGettigan recalled about those dark times.

Then, one day in 1978, he found religion. The pastor at Maranatha Christian Fellowship in Moorestown has never looked back.

"I try to usher in a new life in the hearts and minds of young men," he said.

His interaction with the inmates has been very positive.

"They value it, and they ask the hard questions," he said.

When asked about how long he intends to volunteer his time at the correctional facility, his answer was quick.

"I'm pretty much in it for life," he related.





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## Going Above and Beyond

# Correction Officer Helps Save Woman in Flipped Car, Earns Prestigious Honor

On the afternoon of June 12, Jeomar Alicea made a routine trip to a supermarket in Cinnaminson to pick up a bag of rice. The 36 year-old senior correction officer at Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility was enjoying his vacation day, sunshine and warm temperatures throughout.



*Senior Correction Officer Jeomar Alicea of Albert C. Young Youth Correctional Facility accepts the Meritorious Service Award from Commissioner Gary Lanigan at the Departmental Service Awards Ceremony.*

Just minutes into his drive home, he saw something that was far from pleasant: a driver losing control and the vehicle flipping over. As he described it, "it was surreal."

Driving on Route 130 South behind a 1996 Honda Civic, Alicea noticed a white Ford Fiesta driving down Suckle Highway and merging into Route 130 South, cutting off the Civic directly in front of Alicea's vehicle. The abrupt merger caused the driver of the Civic to

swerve to the right to avoid a collision. However, as the Civic's driver attempted to steer back into the middle lane, the vehicle lost control, skidding

across Route 130 South's multiple lanes before striking a curb and flipping over once. The vehicle landed on its roof in a grassy area separating the north and south lanes.

When the vehicle was skidding across all those lanes – a movement known as yawing – there were few cars in the way. Route 130, Alicea said, is usually a busy roadway, with a speed limit of at least 50 mph.

"I was seeing it, and I was like, 'Oh my God!'" he recalled. "There are usually a lot of cars driving by there. It almost looked like a pathway was open."

Alicea quickly pulled his vehicle over to the right shoulder and dashed across several lanes of Route 130 to reach the median where the vehicle was upside down. Alicea looked through the passenger side window to assess the situation. He then quickly went to the other side to help the motorist.

The driver, a female in her 20s, was partially ejected from the vehicle after it flipped over. Her torso was sticking out of the car, but the rest of her body was pinned inside, he said.

Soon, other people also stopped, among them a retired paramedic. Those lending assistance were able to partially lift the car and remove the driver.

Alicea stabilized the victim's head as she lay on the ground, making sure she didn't move in order to avoid pain. That was the hard part, according to Alicea.

"She was very scared and shaken up," Alicea remembered. "I tried to calm her down, saying everything was going to be OK."

Because she only spoke Spanish, Alicea remained at the scene to translate her recollections. Despite the horrific nature of the accident, Alicea said the victim's only apparent injury was a cut below one of her wrists.

Alicea was recognized with the Meritorious Service Award at the Departmental Service Awards Ceremony on September 18. As described by the department, the award is given for an act "of such an outstanding nature that it engendered local, state national or international attention to both the individual and the New Jersey Department of Corrections."

The award follows one that he received a year earlier for another incident. In September 2014, Alicea received the Commissioner's Commendation, which is given to individuals who have performed "highly intelligent and valuable acts of service."

Alicea was modest when asked about the integral role he had in assisting the injured motorist, saying he simply followed his instincts and what he has been taught in his professional and personal life. They are the kinds of values, he said, that you don't stop practicing just because you're not on the clock.

"If I can help, I will," he said. "That's just who I am. That is my nature."

Still, he is mindful that most people would probably do the bare minimum and not a whole lot more. He believes much of that stems from a lack of communal feeling and being overly guarded.

"We live in a society where people tend to be nonchalant and say, 'That's not my business,'" Alicea opined. "But I think we have to make it our business in order to make a positive difference. People have become very impersonal. They would rather text than make a phone call."

Alicea said the values of helping people and selflessness were learned during his time in the United States Marine Corps, where he served between 1997 and 2001. He had been stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, and he served a year in Iwakuni, Japan.

"They instill in you honor, courage and commitment," Alicea said. "You never lose those values. You feel obligated to help anyone in need."

He believes the quick thinking he exhibited in the June 12 accident was "definitely" honed from his years as a correction officer.

"I was amped up," he said. "You're hyper aware of the situation, what it is you have to do and what has to get done. That is what they teach you at the [Correctional Staff Training] Academy. I love my job. I get to do a service to the community. I get to maintain order at the facility and keep the public safe."







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## All in the Family

# Members of Class 235 Are Joined by Their Loved Ones

There often comes a point during a future officer's time spent at the Correctional Staff Training Academy when the trainee as well as the trainee's loved ones begin to wonder if the physical and emotional investments have been worthwhile. That moment of truth, Training Academy Director Guy Cirillo related, typically occurs a few months into the often intense 14-week process.

"At that point, what we need to do is keep the trainees focused," Cirillo said.

"We want to emphasize the importance of finishing what they started."



*Trainee Jason Pierce and his fellow members of Class 235 take part in physical training.*

*Photo by Chris Carden*

One of the most effective ways to do just that is through Family Day, which gives families of trainees an opportunity to spend an afternoon on the grounds of the Training Academy in Sea Girt and get a first-hand look at the process through which their child, spouse or parent transitions from civilian to correction officer.

Class 235, 153 members strong, will be graduating on November 10 during a ceremony at the

War Memorial in Trenton. Family Day for them was held over two sessions in mid-October.

"At a time when trainees and family members might be questioning if what they're doing is worth it, we attempt to answer that question by bringing everyone together and showing them what our trainees do every day," Cirillo said. "By the end of the day, everyone is excited and inspired."

"We want families to be involved, because they're such an integral part of the success of the recruit," he continued. "Without the support of the families, we wouldn't be able to do our job as effectively as it can be done."

Trainee Jason Pierce, who has two brothers who are members of the New Jersey Department of Corrections custody staff, came away from Family Day with a host of fond memories. One memory, however, stood out above the others.

"During PT (physical training), my 3-year-old daughter was doing push-ups next to me," he recalled. "That was my favorite part of the day, but there was so much more. It was really valuable to give our families an idea of what we're doing now and what lies ahead."

The day's itinerary included welcoming remarks – from NJDOC Chief of Staff Judith Lang, Cirillo and Major Wayne Manstream – an opportunity to watch the trainees march, a tour of the Training Academy and a demonstration from the department's Special Operations Group. Also included was a workshop on stress management/domestic violence, an overview of the curriculum and children's activities.

"I wanted to see what my son accomplished," said Paula Fuentes, whose son, Walter, is a member of Class 235. "It's nice for the family to have some sort of guidance as he moves forward in his new career."

"He's changed, he's matured, he's grown into a man. This is a proud moment for me."

Added Lauren Caruso, Walter Fuentes' girlfriend: "I've seen a positive change, which I attribute to the fact that he's comfortable with everything that's going on, and he's doing exactly what he wants to be doing."

Manstream noted that not all aspects of a correction officer's job are easy on

the officer's family and that it's important for loved ones to know that in advance.

"For example, holiday celebrations should be planned around the employee's shift," he said. "It's best that families aren't surprised by these kinds of issues. During Family Day, we tell them what to expect and try to answer any questions they might have, positive or negative."

Chris Iacovelli, who attended Family Day with her husband, Tom, understands. Their son, Mark, is part of Class 235.

"This is a different type of job," she said. "They're protecting the public, and that responsibility has to come first."

According to Class 235 President Eric Barnett, it is virtually impossible for a trainee to provide an accurate portrayal of life at the Training Academy during weekend visits with the family. That's why he was so pleased by what transpired during Family Day.

"You try to fill them in as much as possible, but Family Day gives you and your family a chance to really connect," he explained. "This class has put in a lot of hard work, and this was an opportunity for our families to see the results of that work."

"I think back to when we first arrived [in Sea Girt]. We were a bunch of individuals. Our instructors deserve a lot of credit, because they turned us into a team. Those who couldn't be part of the team, for whatever reasons, aren't here anymore. We have each other's backs, which is a good feeling."

"Together, we're almost at the finish line," he concluded, "but I'm a firm believer in seeing this all the way through. Right now, there's still work that needs to be done."





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## Angels Among Us

# New Jersey State Prison Workers Help Save Motorists in Vehicle Crash

A three-vehicle accident on the morning of October 29 on a major roadway near New Jersey State Prison in Trenton showed the correctional facility employees' high level of compassion and emergency management skills.

NJSP Assistant Superintendent Timothy Maines had come in that morning at about 7:35 a.m., when, he said, he heard an "ungodly loud boom."

Having a direct view of Route 129 from his second-floor office, Maines looked out the window toward the busy roadway and saw something very disturbing: a Ford Explorer sport-utility vehicle flipping some 15 feet off the ground and then landing upside down. Maines quickly contacted the Trenton Police Department.

"I called and said we've got a horrible accident," he recalled.

The boom was produced after the Explorer, which originally was travelling in the northbound lane of Route 129, lost control and crossed the curbed



*New Jersey State Prison employees who helped save injured motorists in a three-vehicle accident on Route 129 include (from left) Senior Correction Officer Michael Fischer, SCO Steven Adamniak, locksmith David Schubert, senior repairman James Ellmer and Sergeant Gary Samosuk. Not pictured is locksmith Tony Smith.*

median, causing it to collide with a gray sport-utility vehicle. The impact of that crash caused the Explorer to overturn and then collide with a white Buick sport-utility vehicle. Smoke soon billowed from the smashed Explorer's hood.

Before local police, firefighters and ambulances arrived, several NJSP employees initiated a first response in assisting the motorists involved in the crash.

James Ellmer, a senior repairman, was outside during the time of the accident. He was near NJSP's front area with a direct view, with only the six-foot chain-link fence separating him and the accident scene. Ellmer quickly climbed the fence, ran to the scene and saw that the driver, a student at Notre Dame High School in Lawrence, had safely exited the vehicle, but was shaken up.

"He looked very scared," Ellmer recalled. "I've never seen anyone look that distraught. It was like a horror movie."

While the driver made it out safely, the vehicle's passenger, also a Notre Dame High School student, was still trapped inside the vehicle. With the windows blown out from the impact, Ellmer, who's also a trained volunteer firefighter, reached for the passenger's arm to check his pulse. Initially, the passenger was unresponsive. But soon, Ellmer said, the passenger started screaming, writhing in pain as his head was bleeding profusely.

"I was just trying to keep him calm and keep him from further injuring himself," said Ellmer, 23, who's been with the New Jersey Department of Corrections for two years.

With a knife given to him by a motorist who had pulled over to help, Ellmer cut the seat belt to try to remove the passenger. Sergeant Gary Samosuk soon arrived to the scene, crawling into the Explorer through the driver-side window to tend to the passenger. Both he and Ellmer determined there wasn't much they could do to safely remove the passenger until firefighters arrived with a Jaws of Life, since the passenger's legs were trapped under the dashboard, and his head was pinned against the window frame.

The key thing, according to Ellmer, was to prevent additional distress. "Keeping the victim calm can be just as important as keeping him alright physically," he said.

Samosuk then went to the individuals in the two other vehicles involved in the accident. The driver of the gray SUV struck by the Explorer had suffered a



broken wrist, he said. The woman driving the Buick and her child appeared uninjured, he added.

Tony Smith, a locksmith at NJSP, had just cleared security screening when he saw through the ground floor windows smoke rising from the accident scene. The smoke from the smashed truck soon turned into a fire. The locksmith quickly went outside and toward the fence. Smith helped co-worker and fellow locksmith David Schubert climb the fence to get to the accident scene.

Just by chance, a state government tow truck containing a fire extinguisher was parked in front of the prison building to tow a disabled vehicle. Smith reached inside the truck for the fire extinguisher and tossed it over the fence to a Trenton police officer. Fortunately, the fire soon went out without any suppression.

Then, Smith and another NJSP employee, Senior Correction Officer Michael Fischer, were able to get to the accident scene in a vehicle Fischer was operating. Smith provided a towel to Ellmer to provide pressure to the injured passenger's head to prevent additional bleeding.

"Everyone here did something," Smith said. "Nobody was panicking. I'm proud of everyone involved. We did what we could."

NJSP Administrator Steven Johnson said the experience showed the selfless nature of his staff.

"These guys exceeded expectations," he said. "It was incredible what they did."

The men said the incident underscored the importance of not being passive and taking action during times of need to prevent tragedy. Significantly, no fatalities were reported.

Ellmer learned about human nature from this experience.

"There are good people in this world," he stated. "Everyone should lend a hand. It's about teamwork. You don't just walk away."

For Samosuk, the accident was a reminder of life's fragility.

"Be thankful for every moment you have," he emphasized.

Reflecting on the experience, Smith said, "I would hope in a time of need, someone would be there to help me."

Fischer said the experience made clear to him that "angels come in all shapes and sizes."

SCO Steven Adamniak, who also climbed the fence to reach the accident scene, said a sense of unity among his colleagues was his enduring memory of the incident.

"The level of camaraderie in this department is enormous," he observed.





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## Dreamers

# NJDOC Employee 'Dares' Teens to Get Inspired and Set Goals

Alvin R. Smith is on a mission.

A senior communications operator with Central Communications at the New Jersey Department of Corrections for 20 years, he wants to save youth from falling into the proverbial traps common in adolescence: gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, violent crime, dropping out of school and teen pregnancy.



"I didn't want the youth to feel trapped," he said. "Often, their dreams are short-lived because there's no guidance or no mentors around."

One day, Smith, who also is a minister, was at St. Baptist Church in Florence delivering a sermon about a young boy, his ambitions and the difficulties he ran into along the way. The boy refused to give up, he said, continuing to pursue his dreams.

Smith most likely had that parable in mind when he decided to set up a non-profit organization to address teen issues. The result was "Dare 2 Be a Dreamer," founded by Smith in October 2014.

The organization provides children with mentors with whom they can have conversations on various issues, as well as have access to some professionals, such as entrepreneurs, who share stories of having faced similar obstacles.

Since its inception, several meetings have taken place, mostly at locales in Willingboro. In a typical meeting, scenarios are presented – such as bullying – in which participants essentially role play.

Mentors have one-on-one conversations with the teens on various topics. Smith said the sessions help provide lessons in dealing with different situations.

“You get them to think about the consequences of their actions,” he said.

The kids in the program range between ages 13 and 18. He described age 13 as “the crossroads for your decision making,” as that’s when the kids start making some tough choices, and not everything appears straightforward.

“Most of it is peer pressure,” Smith explained about why kids sometimes make undesirable decisions. “You want to teach them to have a strong mind and form their own opinions.”

Smith is determined to grow the number of participants. The “Dare 2 Be a Dreamer” session in the summer, held at Foster Military Lodge Temple Association Inc. in Willingboro, was attended by 70 kids and parents. The theme was “Wrong Choices,” and climbing your way out of problems.



*Alvin R. Smith*

“Everything was geared toward having second chances,” he said. “But they (the children) can’t do it alone. I believe the community has to be involved with the youth as well.”

Another summer meeting was highlighted by the NJDOC Project Pride program, through which minimum custody offenders discuss their personal experiences with drugs and alcohol. They had cautioned that one wrong choice could have far-reaching consequences.

Project Pride Coordinator Michael Ritter called “Dare 2 Be a Dreamer” a “win-win” for kids and their guardians.

“It is an extremely positive program,” Ritter said. “We were honored to be there. It provides a resource for students and parents alike to develop healthy relationships. It is a safe place to go where they can have fun and do different things.”

Smith said he was pleased with the positive reaction to Project Pride.

"If you don't capture their attention, you'll lose them," he said. "It's about keeping it real, being transparent and being yourself. When they let down their guard, you got them."

He plans to have presentations in the future focusing on personal finance and health care. Eventually, Smith said he hopes to take the kids to places like Washington, D.C., and the Inner Harbor in Baltimore to see various sites beyond New Jersey's borders. To emphasize the theme of team building, Smith has taken kids to sporting events, including Philadelphia 76ers games.

His approach is intended to get the kids to be more proactive about the decisions they make in life, he said.

An upcoming presentation will focus on dressing appropriately. Whether fair or not, Smith said appearance matters plenty, and one is often judged by it more than anything else, especially when trying to get a job.

"Your appearance makes a big difference," he said.

He's confident the program will continue to grow, given that it's intended to create an environment of positivity.

"It's going to branch out," Smith said. "We want to help them overcome obstacles. We tell them no one can stop your dream but yourself. Anybody is welcome. We do not turn anyone away."







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## Crisis negotiations

# CINT named 'Best of the Best' in handling hostage situations

The father was furious after excessive bullying prompted his son to commit suicide.

Wanting to get even, the father, who had a firearm and a rope, stormed into the high-school classroom where his son took his life and held several students and a teacher hostage. It was up to members of the Critical Incident Negotiation Team (CINT), which is part of NJDOC's Special Operations Group, to negotiate with the gunman to prevent serious injury to the kids.

"He was very agitated," recalled CINT member and Classification Officer John Stoneham, who oversaw his team in the negotiations.

A phone call was made to the hostage taker, in order for team members to talk to him to calm him down and talk through the crisis.



*The New Jersey Department of Corrections' Critical Incident Negotiation Team (CINT) received a first-place commendation in the "Best of the Best" training competition for their skillful handling of a hostage scenario.*

"The primary goal is to make sure the kids aren't hurt," Stoneham said.

After about four hours, CINT persuaded the gunman to release the students.

"We helped him understand that most of the kids in the classroom had nothing to do with the bullying, and doing any harm to the few that did bully his son wouldn't bring him back. He could do more to honor his son by becoming an advocate against bullying" Stoneham explained.

Fortunately, the incident wasn't real. However, the skillful handling of this hostage scenario by members of CINT impressed evaluators from the FBI so much that the federal agency awarded CINT a first-place commendation in the "Best of the Best" training competition.

The exercises took place in June at Manville High School in Somerset County. The high school served as the setting where members from 10 different law enforcement agencies, including NJDOC, engaged in various scenarios. The teams were evaluated mostly by FBI officials and others in law enforcement, who looked for things such as how participants set up equipment, how they communicated with the hostage taker and amongst themselves, and outcomes.

It was the second year in which the NJDOC participated. Other participants included sheriff's offices, county corrections departments and local police.

"It's quite unique. It opens your mind on how things really occur," said Major Edwin Rodriguez, who oversees CINT and was one of the evaluators at the competition.

Stoneham said the recognition underscores that the team's regular practice of crisis situations has been effective.

"It provides a sense of accomplishment and a sense of pride for our team" Stoneham explained. "We train regularly in order to make sure we're ready, should something happen. Everything we put into this team was acknowledged and recognized."

In a letter to NJDOC Commissioner Gary Lanigan, FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Bradley W. Cohen wrote that the team "performed superbly and stood head and shoulders above the other teams."

Special Agent Scott Owens, coordinator of the FBI Crisis and Hostage Negotiations Team in Newark, echoed Cohen's sentiments.

"They set the standard for negotiations training," Owens said in a phone interview. "You could really tell by the techniques they use they have trained together many times. It's not just one or two guys overseeing it. For them, it's a team of all stars. They all settled into their roles nicely."

He added the administrators of the NJDOC deserve a lot of credit for enabling team members to train regularly.

"A lot of times, that gets cut (due to financial constraints). I commend the NJDOC leadership."

CINT, which specializes in crisis negotiations, has been in existence for about 20 years. Some 15 members of the team participated in the "Best of the Best" competition. CINT is comprised of people who work in various positions within NJDOC, including teachers, social workers, and custody staff. The variations help in deciding who best to include when addressing a particular situation, based on their skill set, personal experiences and attributes, officials said.

"We have a diverse group of people," Stoneham said. "There's really no rank among us. We're all equally trained negotiators."

In a typical situation/scenario, there can be several people involved, all with a unique role. There is a primary negotiator, who talks directly with the person holding the hostages or in crisis. There is the "coach," who listens in on the conversation, and communicates with the primary negotiator non-verbally, mostly through Post-It notes or other physical cues. Other members post/write information on dry erase boards to chronicle the communications and developments. Another role is a liaison to the tactical operations group that would be called upon in the event of a communication breakdown with the hostage taker.

"We're all trained to work on the negotiations process," said Major Rodriguez. "They all have a role. Ideally, we need between six and eight people, to function effectively."

He emphasized one of the most important aspects of the negotiations process is active listening. He said listening rather than talking helps CINT members look for "hooks," key clues that could lead the negotiators to learn valuable information that can help them determine the hostage taker's motives and help diffuse the situation.

"The conversations help you get underneath the layers into what is bothering the individual," Stoneham explained.

Listening also is instructive in that it can detect "barbs," or information that could set off the person, Rodriguez said.

He believes in these situations, it's a matter of time before the hostage taker starts behaving more rationally than in the beginning of the episode.

"They are going to calm down," Rodriguez said. "You can't maintain that agitated level forever."

To stay sharp, CINT does monthly drills, at various locations in the state.

Stoneham and Rodriguez said personality traits like compassion and empathy are instrumental in communicating effectively. They added that when CINT members communicate with a hostage taker, they attempt to treat him or her like a friend or family member.

"You have to be the kind of person who cares," Stoneham explained.

That's why the commendation CINT received from the "Best of the Best" competition really moved Stoneham and his fellow members.

"We truly do it because we want to do it," he said. "We feel we have something to contribute by helping people. We're never looking for accolades. We try to be humble, but winning this was truly exciting."





FALL 2015/WINTER 2016



## Dedicated Professionals

# NJDOC Employees Honored at Awards Ceremony

Innovative ideas are fairly easy to come up with, but converting those ideas into action is a bit more challenging.

Fortunately, the New Jersey Department of Corrections has many individuals who go beyond their job descriptions to make sure vital departmental programs are run efficiently and effectively. On December 11, the annual Division of Programs and Community Service awards ceremony celebrated the work of those individuals who carry out the day-to-day functions of programs that are centered around education, religion, social services and volunteering.

Assistant Commissioner Darcella Sessomes praised this year's award recipients for their leadership, positive attitude and willingness to help.

"The NJDOC should do all that it can to recognize, mentor and promote future leaders within the department," Sessomes said.

Commissioner Gary M. Lanigan, who attended the ceremony, said the NJDOC as a whole has received credit over the years for being ahead of the curve on major criminal justice issues. However, many of the individuals who help implement the vision rarely receive the public accolades. That's why, he said, such a ceremony was a perfect opportunity to recognize them.



*Vandana Mathur, second from left, a contract administrator for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, received the Office of Community Programs' Team Player Award at the Division of Programs and Community Service Awards ceremony, which was held on December 11. Joining her, from left, are Commissioner Gary M. Lanigan, Director of Community Programs Marcus Hicks and Assistant Commissioner Darcella Sessomes.*

This year's award recipients are:

- \*Team Player Award: Vandana Mathur;
- \*Education Supervisor of the Year: David Metelow of South Woods State Prison;
- \*Office of Transitional Services Director's Award: John Piercy;
- \*Volunteer Coordinator of the Year Award: Reverend Jonathan Haslett of Bayside State Prison;
- \*Social Work Supervisor of the Year Award: Crescent Clarkson of Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center;
- \*Facilitator of the Year Award: Reverend Bruce Crossland of South Woods State Prison;
- \*Education Department of the Year: Bayside State Prison;
- \*Religious Services Department of the Year: South Woods State Prison;
- \*Office of Education Director's Award: Jesse Glover of Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility;
- \*Office of Community Programs and Outreach Services Director's Award: Diana Grasselli;
- \*Chaplain Supervisor of the Year: Reverend Estelle David of Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women;
- \*Social Services Department of the Year: Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women; and
- \*Leader of the Year: Leanne Cook.

Norma Williams and Imam Rasoul Suluki, both of whom are retiring, also were recognized at the ceremony for their years of service.







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## Hope and Glory

# Honor Guard Helps Lead Annual Suicide Awareness Walk

Linda Patterson, a Hamilton resident who lost a son to suicide after battling bipolar disorder, believes greater public awareness on the sensitive subject is necessary. Thus, when she saw members of the Northern State Prison Honor Guard perform at a 2012 event sponsored by Cop 2 Cop -- the suicide prevention hotline for law enforcement officers -- she thought the unit would make an ideal participant for "Out of the Darkness," a community walk she was organizing for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Her wish soon became a reality. Since 2013, the honor guard has participated each year in the event, which takes place at Veterans Park in Hamilton. The partnership between her and the NJDOC honor guard works well for a good cause.

"It was really overwhelming," Patterson recalled. "Just to have them be there was an honor in itself. From what this world is going through, it's always good to see men in uniform."

The reception they received from organizers of the suicide awareness walk the first year



*Members of the Northern State Prison Honor Guard lead the "Out of the Darkness" suicide awareness walk at Veterans Park in Hamilton.*



was something Major Luis Soto will never forget. "We were asked to lead the walk," he said. "They saw our flags. It made us feel proud. It was great."

The honor guard participants said the walks are simultaneously sad and celebratory. Hearts are heavy, knowing that a friend or a loved one is no longer with them physically. However, they said the walkers take comfort from knowing their loved one's spirit remains strong and they are fondly remembered by family and peers. Signs reading "Love you" and "Miss you" are commonly held up by the walkers.

Senior Correction Officer Raymond Ballester, who has been leading the honor guard and has been with NJDOC for 25 years, counts the walk among his favorite events.

"It's an honor," he said. "We love it. We want to keep active."

It appears the walk will remain a regular annual event, as the level of participation -- and the amount of funds raised -- have steadily grown.

In 2013, there were approximately 600 people in the community walk. In 2014, Patterson said 852 walkers helped raise nearly \$45,000. In the walk that was held in October, Patterson said some 900 people registered, helping raise more than \$60,000. The money goes toward community awareness and outreach programs focusing on suicide prevention.

Both Ballester and Patterson hope the walks become even larger in the future. They want other law enforcement organizations to get involved as well.

"I want the walkers to be surrounded by a sea of blue," Ballester stated.

Lieutenant Edwin Mercado, another longtime participant of the NJDOC honor guard, believes much of the higher level of participation at the annual walks is due to more awareness on the emotional subject.

"People are recognizing suicide as a problem more than ever, especially in law enforcement," Mercado said.

He said the staff can detect many of the warning signs

"On a daily basis, we can sense a change of behavior, to see if they are missing work, or they are drinking a lot," he said.

Both Ballester and Mercado have dealt with colleagues who were on the brink of committing suicide. One colleague posted messages on the Internet, and they were able to ping his phone and get in contact with the individual. They intervened, and no tragic incident took place.

They believe the root cause of many suicides is an overwhelming sadness or inability to overcome setbacks.

"Depression is a big thing. Divorce, finances, etc. Their state of mind is not where it needs to be," Mercado said.

Ballester and Mercado frequently keep in contact with the victims' families.

"We check up on the families to reassure them the department is there," Mercado said.

The NJDOC honor guard attends funerals, holds annual September 11 remembrance ceremonies and participates in graduations and Special Olympics events. They said the honor guard has evolved throughout the years.

"It is more demanding," Ballester said. "We've improved to the point where uniformity is paramount."

The correction officers' longtime involvement with the honor guard stems from their love for the department and for what it represents, in addition to the opportunity to support fellow officers and their families.

"Nobody pays us extra for doing this," Mercado explained. "We'll get a pat on the back. That is all we need."

"We've always volunteered our services," Soto explained. "Guys mostly practice on their own time. We always try to get our marching skills down so we don't look like a mish mosh. I'm very proud of the work we do."

Patterson, for one, is a huge fan. She couldn't be more grateful for the department's strong support and encouragement in the community walks.

"It's an overwhelming feeling when they stand there with us," she said. "It serves as a reminder that we are not alone. There is hope. We're all trying to fight the same thing."





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## The Gift of Life

# ADTC Correction Officer Receives Kidney from Co-worker

One day last spring, Gladys Garcia noticed something didn't look right with Ernesto Dizon, her close friend and longtime co-worker at the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center in Avenel.

"His face looked very swollen, and it looked like it lost some color," she recalled.

Running into him another time while getting a soda from a vending machine, Garcia - a communications operator at ADTC for the last nine years - asked Dizon if he was feeling okay. It was then that Dizon revealed some shocking news: He needed a new kidney.

His kidneys were only functioning at 20 percent. For several months, Dizon - a senior correction officer who has been with the New Jersey Department of Corrections for 10 years - had quietly been going to dialysis sessions three mornings a week. After each session, Dizon would go straight to ADTC to work his shift.

Upon hearing the news, Garcia asked Dizon to "give me your doctor's number." The reason: she wanted to donate one of her kidneys to him.

Initially, Dizon thought Garcia was simply making another wisecrack. Having worked with



*Gladys Garcia, a communications operator at Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center, donated one of her kidneys to her friend and co-worker, Senior Correction Officer Ernesto Dizon.*

Garcia for several years, Dizon had become accustomed to her unique sense of humor.

"He looked at me like I was joking and then walked away," Garcia remembered.

Eventually, Dizon realized Garcia was being serious. Nonetheless, he felt uncomfortable with her making such a significant, generous offer.

"He told his family that he didn't want to put me through all the pain," she said, "but I didn't think twice."

Garcia said reaching her decision hardly involved any soul searching, and that "it was just a gut feeling." She thought of Dizon's daughters and the impact their father's deteriorating health would have on them.

"Their father is the world for those little girls," Garcia said. "He needs to walk down the aisle for them on their wedding day." Dizon has three daughters, ages 7, 9 and 13.

The communications operator said even psychiatrists and other medical professionals asked during the approval process if she was certain she wanted to make the organ donation.

"I was absolutely sure," Garcia said confidently. "I told them my kidney is not going to be rejected. My kidney belongs in his body."

It turned out she was right. The kidney transplant took place on October 13 at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston. The procedure of removing a kidney from Garcia lasted about two hours. She said the procedure involved an incision, a camera and some "sharp objects."

Dizon's kidney transplant took about six hours. "It's like getting a new battery," said Dizon, who currently is on leave. "It is a gift of life. It is amazing."

On that day, Garcia hardly felt nervous.

"I was excited. I was looking forward to it," she said. "I couldn't wait for the day to arrive. It was like Christmas."

The whole process went smoothly.

"The doctors said it was one of the fastest kidney acceptances they had seen," Garcia said.

Dizon praised Garcia for her bravery and altruism.

"It's unbelievable," he said. "She is an angel. She saved my life. She takes on the character of her mom. I'll always be grateful."

Dizon's health problems began some four years earlier, at age 49, when a routine blood test revealed he had higher-than-normal levels of creatine, an acid that helps transport energy to cells. Having elevated levels can cause kidney damage, the correction officer said.

After the levels remained stubbornly high, he was placed on a dialysis. Last spring, he learned he would need a new kidney, or he would need to keep the

grueling dialysis regimen. Later in the year, Dizon broke his hip. He believes that injury was a by-product of the numerous medications he had been taking, adding that his bones felt "brittle."

In the weeks leading to the operation, Garcia had gone through a battery of tests, including a mammogram, stress test, bone density exam, blood pressure and cholesterol screenings. Everything came back fine, with Garcia describing the process as "pieces of a puzzle coming together."

Garcia spent three days in the hospital.

"I've been doing everything as normal as can be," she said just before knocking on a wood table.

Major Colm Foley of ADTC has known Dizon close to 10 years. He described him as easygoing, smart and capable.

"It is an unfortunate thing that has happened to him," Foley said. "He is an excellent officer. He is a credit to the department."

Garcia, according to Foley, is an orderly, dedicated and diligent employee whose willingness to help was underscored through her kidney donation, he said.

"She went above and beyond. She gave something of herself that not many people would," he remarked. "It's great the department has people of her character."

Dizon said he is improving gradually and remains hopeful and positive minded about the future.

"I'm taking it one day at a time," he said. "My kids have more time with me now."





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## Helping Hand

# Correction Officer Recruit's Kindness Makes Impact on Accident Victim

Correction Officer Recruit Michael Tylutki certainly doesn't consider himself a hero. Daniela Bossi, however, respectfully disagrees.

Tylutki and Bossi were total strangers until the early-evening hours of December 23. They were brought together in the aftermath of a three-vehicle accident in Hamilton.

One of the vehicles involved was driven by Bossi's boyfriend; she was a passenger. Bossi, a senior at Notre Dame High School in Lawrence Township, sustained a broken right ankle and fibula in the crash.

Shortly after the accident occurred, a vehicle occupied by Michael and Michelle Tylutki and their three daughters – all between the ages of 2 and 5 – passed by. Mom was driving, and Dad was seated next to her, his lap occupied with three pizzas. They were on their way to his mother's house.

"When we came upon the accident, we immediately realized it must have just happened, because there were no EMTs, police or anyone else at the scene," related



*When Correction Officer Recruit Michael Tylutki passed an accident scene, he didn't hesitate to stop and lend assistance.*

Tylutki, a member of Basic Course for State Correction Officers, Class 235, who was assigned to the Central Reception and Assignment Facility after graduating in November 2015.

"Both my wife and I saw that there was someone in one of the cars," he continued, "so I said to my wife, 'We have to stop.' She pulled over."

After exiting his vehicle, Tylutki encountered two males on cell phones who were standing outside the vehicles that had been involved in the accident. He showed them his credentials and asked if everyone was okay. One of the men said that his girlfriend was injured.

Tylutki approached the young woman, who turned out to be Daniela Bossi. At the time, she was still in her boyfriend's vehicle.

"She was pretty upset," Tylutki recalled. "She said that she couldn't feel her right foot and that she had pain up to her knee. Her boyfriend said he'd called 911, so I tried to comfort her until the EMTs arrived. First, I told her not to move her leg. Then I attempted to calm her down. I held her hand, told her the ambulance would be there soon, and everything was going to be alright.

"Here it was two days before Christmas, a cold and rainy night, and the girl is sitting in the car, injured, waiting for an ambulance to come," he added.

"Nobody else had stopped. I really felt badly for her."

Once police and EMTs responded, Tylutki provided them with as much information as he could, then returned to his family and proceeded with his plans for the evening.

He assumed that his role in what transpired that evening had been concluded. That assumption proved to be incorrect.

A few weeks later, Tylutki and a co-worker at CRAF were discussing the importance of the Correctional Officer Training Academy's lessons on how to be a first responder. That prompted the 30-year-old correction officer recruit to share his account of the December 23 incident.

"I'm telling him what happened, and he's looking at me real intently," Tylutki remembered. "Finally, he says he has to ask me a question. He asks, 'Did you hold the girl's hand?' I'm wondering if I'd done something wrong, but I said I did hold her hand. He then tells me, 'I read about this on Facebook.'

"I have to say, I was pretty surprised."

Indeed, Bossi had posted her own account of the episode on Facebook. Since she didn't know Tylutki's name, she simply identified him as a correction officer. Bossi's posting also said that she wanted to locate the officer so that she can personally thank him and let him know how much his assistance meant to her.

Once Tylutki's wife also saw the Facebook posting, the couple was able to contact Bossi, who then was able to personally deliver her message of thanks.

"He was like my angel in the moment," Bossi said. "That night, I was in the car, in excruciating pain, and he held my hand, settled me down and got me



to stop focusing on what had just happened. Even though I was in agony, he had me laughing. He was awesome.

"I honestly didn't expect to find him, but what I wrote on Facebook got so many shares. Once we reconnected, I was so excited."

Since then, the Tylutkis have regularly checked on Bossi's progress as she recovers from her injuries.

"I grew up having so much respect for law enforcement," Bossi stated. "These days, I know that not everybody feels that way. That's why I want as many people as possible to know what happened the night of the accident. Here was an officer, off duty and with his family, who was willing to help. I can't even express how grateful I am."

Tylutki, who was employed as a butcher before going to work for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, is convinced that there was nothing extraordinary about his actions on December 23.

"What if, God forbid, one of the accident victims wasn't breathing, and nobody stopped?" he said. "My view is, if you are able to help, you should help. I suppose that's why I wanted to work in law enforcement."

There was, he admitted, another reason he lent assistance at the scene of the accident.

"I would hope that when my children are old enough to drive, if they're ever in that situation, that somebody would stop," he concluded.

